

# Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council

## Meeting Minutes for February 4, 2021

*Note: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the meeting was held via video conference. A recording of the meeting is available at:*

<https://zoom.us/rec/share/fREfgjZwi2PCraavDRviTpiAKiwlJBO7dyzdNBLsBlxZZi9dzKLPI4p-gXDR9V8.ryrXxNo99gKYD9I2> Passcode: rBBCDr9&

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**Welcome and Call to Order.** Chairperson Alan Bell called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m. The following Council members and others attended:

### Advisory Council Members

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Alan Bell, Chairperson  
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson  
Shelley Spencer, Secretary  
Emily Harris  
Henrietta Saunders  
Maria Pesqueira  
Sylvia Jenkins  
Terry Guen (by phone w/o audio ability)

### Presenters

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Arnold Randall, Forest Preserves  
Eileen Figel, Forest Preserves  
Alice Brandon, Forest Preserves  
Benjamin Cox, Friends of the Forest Preserves  
Chip O'Leary, Forest Preserves  
John McCabe, Forest Preserves

Laurel Ross and Commissioner Stanley Moore did not attend.

Other meeting participants include Michelle Jordan of Commissioner Suffredin's office, Beth Dunn and Greg Mueller of the Chicago Botanic Garden, Jenn Baader from the Chicago Zoological Society, Laura Milkert from the Field Museum, Bob Megquier of Openlands, and Rex Tai from City Bureau. A full list of participants is presented in Attachment A.

Alan indicated that the meeting is being recorded in compliance with the open meetings act. Alan thanked Mark Templeton for continuing his role as Vice Chair, Shelley Spencer for beginning her term as Secretary, and Mike DeSantiago for previously serving as Secretary. Alan introduced Henrietta "Hank" Saunders and welcomed her to the Council. Hank indicated that she has a background in financial and organizational management. She is active in Faith in Place and other organizations focused on conservation and is delighted to join the Council.

**Approval of Minutes.** Eileen Figel indicated that the draft minutes for September 9 should be corrected to include Steve Hughes as a presenter. A motion was made by Mark Templeton to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2020 meeting with this correction. The motion was seconded by Shelley Spencer. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Alan Bell	Aye	Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Mike DeSantiago	Aye	Laurel Ross	<i>absent</i>
Terry Guen	<i>no audio</i>	Henrietta Saunders	Aye

Name	Vote
Emily Harris	Aye
Sylvia Jenkins	Aye
Commissioner Moore	<i>absent</i>

Name	Vote
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye

The minutes were approved.

**Public comments.** No public comments were submitted.

**Chair's Report.** Alan reported on the following items.

- Resolution honoring Wendy Paulson. Alan noted that Wendy's focus on conservation and volunteerism will have a lasting impact and proposed a resolution to honor her commitment to the Forest Preserves. Council members shared their appreciation for Wendy and her life-time commitment to conservation which goes far beyond her work with the Council. Eileen Figel indicated that the hours Wendy devoted to the Council's work should be corrected to over 600 hours. A motion was made by Mark to approve the resolution with this correction; the motion was seconded by Emily Harris. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Alan Bell	Aye
Mike DeSantiago	Aye
Terry Guen	<i>no audio</i>
Emily Harris	Aye
Sylvia Jenkins	Aye
Commissioner Moore	<i>absent</i>

Name	Vote
Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Laurel Ross	<i>absent</i>
Henrietta Saunders	Aye
Shelley Spencer	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye

The resolution was approved.

- Update on 2020 sustainability & climate initiatives. Alan reported that the FPCC Green Team made significant progress advancing sustainability goals in 2020, including installing blue recycling cans across the preserves, submitting an application to name a portion of the Palos region an Urban Night Sky Place, increasing engagement around sustainability, and securing 100% clean energy for the district's 2020 electricity portfolio via renewal energy credits. Alan indicated that the Council will have a more in-depth discussion about climate change at an upcoming meeting. Emily commended Anthony Tindall for his leadership in developing the climate resilience plan and asked Eileen to send a link to the report so the Council can review it prior to the upcoming meeting. Alan also thanked Anthony for his hard work.
- Update on referendum. Alan reported that President Preckwinkle and several commissioners support advancing a referendum in 2022. A team of conservation advocates led by FOTFP, Openlands and others is working on this. Alan wants to ensure that the Council is fully engaged in this effort.
- Establishing 2021 strategic priorities. Alan noted that the Council has done extraordinary work on the position papers; they include strong policy guidance focused on the mission. An additional step is needed to tie the recommendations into the strategic plan for implementing the NCCP. How do we make these recommendations actionable? Once we identify key priorities, how do we layer them out

over time? Alan asked each position paper team to identify 2 to 4 strategic objectives that are actionable this year and be prepared to share these at the April Council meeting. Sylvia Jenkins noted that, during recent briefings, President Preckwinkle immediately mentioned the referendum; Sylvia suggests that the Council focus on visible successes which build support for this effort. Mike DeSantiago added that it would be interesting to see how the recommendations cross-pollinate across papers. Alan noted that some priorities may not be covered by the position papers and he does not want the Council to lose sight of these.

**Discussion with General Superintendent Arnold Randall.** General Superintendent Arnold Randall provided the following updates:

- Cell towers. FPCC went through a process of selecting sites that are disturbed and/or have buildings on them, such as service yards. An agreement with Edge Wireless to market these preselected sites for cell towers will go to the board this month. Arnold added that we clearly don't want cell towers in inappropriate locations, but there are a limited number of sites which are acceptable and can generate some revenue to support our work and improve cell service for visitors.
- Winnetka storm water project at Skokie Lagoons. The lagoons were built to manage storm water; this is the only reason the district was open to considering a proposal from Winnetka to reconfigure the lagoons to better manage storm water. After several years, we have agreed on some general principles and continue to move forward with this proposal to help better manage storm water.
- Holocaust Museum parking lot (Skokie). Under a previous administration, the district approved an agreement to provide parking for the museum on FPCC land. Land adjacent to the existing parking lot is controlled by the County Department of Highways. The museum has proposed reconfiguring the lot to use a portion of the County-controlled land to allow for bus turning and parking. This will go to the FPCC land use committee for review and the position papers will provide guidance for the review process.
- Glencoe proposal to annex the Chicago Botanic Garden site. FPCC has land in many areas of unincorporated Cook County. The County has an initiative to incorporate unincorporated areas and have local villages take responsibility for policing these areas and providing other public services. The FPCC and the Garden are looking at this proposal; to move forward there must be a net benefit to the FPCC and the Garden.

Alan noted that staff reached out to him to review the cell tower proposal and he determined it aligned with the criteria outlined in the position paper. Alan thanked Arnold and staff for their approach to these issues.

**Restoration Progress Report.** John McCabe and Chip O'Leary presented a report on progress made towards the NCCP goal to restore 30,000 acres to ecological health.

Alan congratulated the team for the impressive scale of the work. Shelley indicated that Senator Durbin is proposing a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation Corps and asked if the FPCC will benefit from this. John McCabe explained that FPCC is working closely with Openlands to advance this proposal and confirmed the district would benefit greatly. Hank indicated this may be funded as part of the large infrastructure bill proposed by the Biden administration. Hank also asked if she could share a link to the restoration progress report with others. Eileen will work with Communications Director Carl Vogel to get the link posted; Carl is also exploring other options to share this information. Alan added that seeing the work being done resonates with people more than seeing a static photo. Arnold added that many visitors have been impressed with the work and noted that the district has made a lot of progress with limited resources. Arnold thanked

John McCabe and his team for their concerted effort to use all available resources (staff, volunteers, conservation corps, contractors) as effectively and efficiently as possible.

**REDI position paper update.** Shelley reminded the Council that this paper has two parts. [Part 1](#) focused on racial equity. The team has now turned its attention to part 2 which focuses on diversity and inclusion. Shelley reported that the team started with a series of informational interviews. Suggestions include reviewing work place policies to ensure inclusivity, using signs and symbols (such as a small rainbow) to show we are truly welcoming everyone, and including stakeholders very early in the process. Another suggestion is to expand MBE/WBE preferences to include LGBTQ-owned businesses. Raquel Garcia-Alvarez has been researching best practices in diversity and inclusion; it is a lot of information. Some key findings include:

- 2 in 5 adults 65 and over have a disability.
- 1 in 4 women have a disability.
- Many LGBT workers are in lower paid job and experience lower well-being overall.

Shelley stated that we need to use simple, uncomplicated language that people can understand right away. The committee wants to be very aware of the language we use to define people. Shelley invited suggestions for feedback or other people to interview.

Emily asked how we can make sure we focus and have this lens in front of us without becoming overwhelmed with information. How do we get to a high-level policy document that can fit in four pages?

Alan agreed that this is a complex issue and it is important to think through our strategic objectives. It would be great if we could solve every DEI issue, but we have to refine the effort and relate it to our mission. Alan asked the team to focus on people with limited access and who feel they don't belong at the preserves. Many people from lower income communities don't know what is there or don't feel welcome. How do we bring them in? Shelley added that sometimes people don't have the right gear (hiking boots, etc.), but this may be beyond what we can deliver.

Emily asked that FPCC utilize Zoom's auto-captioning for all Council meetings going forward and provide captions for videos prior to posting them. Emily also asked that we let the public know that they can request and the district will provide an accommodation to allow them to participate fully.

Emily reported we have also experienced challenges; Eileen provided a quick update on recent progress and recent challenges. Once challenge included a white supremacist group which gathered the preserves; Arnold and Eileen explained that the FPCC is working with the State's Attorney to protect first amendment rights and provide guidance to staff for how to respond when they see gatherings such as these. Maria asked if the FPCC can add language to all permits denouncing racism and emphasizing the preserves mission is to welcome all. Arnold and Eileen will explore this with the State's Attorney. Alan indicated that the land use reform work is also looking at language on permits.

Emily commended staff for taking these REDI concerns so seriously and being thoughtful about how to move this forward. She added, "We are so fortunate to have this administration continuing this work."

[Acquisition and Disposition of Land](#) **position paper update.** Alan explained that Laurel had a family emergency and could not attend, but she has been very engaged in this work. He then provided an update on implementation. (See Attachment B.) Key recommendations include:

1. Find creative ways to acquire more land, with the goal of adding 21,000 acres of land to the system by 2040.

2. Use land conservation models that do not necessarily include ownership, such as easements and other land management tools.
3. Ensure that land use remains within our mission, including a moratorium on the formal conveyance or disposition of land while the current decision-making process is reviewed, and updated land disposition policies are proposed and approved.
4. Consider equity and access in decisions about the location of land to acquire.
5. Build public support for the Forest Preserves (including the Board of Commissioners, strategic partners and the public at large).

The goal is to bring the recommendations back to the Council and then to the full Board.

Alan thanked Chris Slattery and staff for being open and receptive to these discussions.

Alan posed a key question to the Council as follows:

Prior to the delivery of a conveyance recommendation by the Real Estate (or Land Use) Committee to the Superintendent for recommendation to the full Board, should the Real Estate Committee be allowed to confer with and secure the non-binding assessments or recommendations of other committees or councils of the District (including the Conservation and Policy Council)?

He explained that Arnold and the staff have been very willing to provide informal updates, but asked the Council if a more formal process should be adopted to allow the Council to weigh in.

Mike noted this issue crosses several position papers and the Council should be engaged in these discussions.

Mark added that these are often permanent decisions and therefore very important. If these decisions are being made frequently, we may need a committee (versus the full Council) which can convene and respond quickly. Mark also noted there is strong trust between the Council and staff; part of the Council's role is to provide leadership when there is a different administration and senior team.

Shelley agreed we want to advise, but not be an impediment to the staff and their work. She suggested that the Council review should kick in for larger issues only.

Maria indicated she has full trust in staff leadership. Should there be a formal review process established for the Council, there should be clear boundaries for Council members who are not here to do the day to day work, but rather to advise.

Chris Slattery thanked Alan for his hard work to really understand a very complicated process and code. She added that this is a time-consuming process which sometimes lacks clarity. She noted that, at today's meeting, Arnold gave the Council an update on some land uses issues coming down the pike. Chris suggested this continue and that the Council designate one or two liaisons who can provide deeper input on these types of issues. She added that there are still requests from neighboring municipalities for FPCC land, and sometimes we require help—especially when politics are involved. For example, the proposed ballfield at Brookfield Zoo. Chris added we are happy to engage in whatever manner the Council chooses.

Alan added that the process used with the cell towers was perfect. FPCC's chief attorney provided Alan guidance on the legal issues and he determined the proposal did not conflict with the position paper.

Arnold added that we want the Council to be briefed and to provide guidance. We just need to figure out the process.

Alan indicated the working group will develop specific recommendations and review them with Arnold and the Council.

**Proposals for use of 2022 reserve funds.** Benjamin Cox provided an overview of proposals to utilize reserve funds for highly visible projects which can leverage matching funds and advance a key NCCP goal. Eileen added that the working (1) used a REDI lens to determine target areas where we want to expand engagement, (2) bundled proposed projects together for higher visibility, and (3) recommends a listening tour to engage communities, discuss proposed concepts, and listen to what they want and need.

**Future meeting protocols.** The Council opted to continuing using Zoom for future meetings if the closed captioning feature can be activated and made available.

**On-site meetings and tours.** The Council will likely meet virtually in April, but will consider returning to on-site meetings at various forest preserves as this becomes safe. If it is not possible to safely convene in-person meetings, the Council will consider convening outdoor site visits.

**Stories/Testimonials.** Alan invited Shelley, Mark and Maria to share personal stories about their connections to the preserves.

Shelley goes to the preserves several times per month. She loves the peace and quiet and beauty. She loves to watch the landscape change with the seasons. “It is a very simple pleasure, but for me it is a very profound one.” Shelley added that, during COVID, it has also been a great place for people watching (and dog watching).

Mark spoke about moving his family to Hyde Park and discovering the Palos complex. “It was an incredible, almost life-saver, for our family.” He talked about how his son and daughter completely changed when they visited the preserves, getting so fascinated by decomposing logs and leaves. Mark added, “One of the things that motivates me in this work is to get more people out in nature—particularly those people for whom it is challenging for financial reasons, location, or other concerns.” Getting more people out to experience these benefits matters a lot to Mark and motivates him and his work on the Council.

Maria talked about respite and healing during these times, and being able to walk with her mother in the preserves. She also talked about the importance of nature to native populations, noting that Chicago has the largest urban native community in the nation. “Indigenous and native people are using these spaces to keep connected to our roots and culture. I want to share that many blessings and moments when people really needed the healing—there has been a lot of loss in the native community due to covid—were very special. So I want to say thank you to the caretakers, the staff of the Forest Preserves, for keeping our preserves healthy and well.”

**Adjournment.** A motion to adjourn was made by Mike and seconded by Maria. The results of the roll call vote are as follows:

Name	Vote
Alan Bell	Aye
Mike DeSantiago	Aye
Terry Guen	<i>no audio</i>

Name	Vote
Maria Pesqueira	Aye
Laurel Ross	<i>absent</i>
Henrietta Saunders	Aye

Emily Harris	Aye
Sylvia Jenkins	Aye
Commissioner Moore	<i>absent</i>

Shelley Spencer	Aye
Mark Templeton	Aye

The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 11:44 a.m.

## **Attachment A**

### **Participants at February 4, 2021 Meeting of the Conservation & Policy Council**

Alan Bell, Council	Jane Balaban, Key Steward
Anthony Tindall, FPCC	Jen Baader, Chicago Zoological Society
Arnold Randall, FPCC	Karen Vaughan, FPCC
Benjamin Cox, FOTFP	Laura Milkert, Field Museum
Beth Dunn, Chicago Botanic Garden	Liz Millan, FPCC
Bob Megquier , Openlands	Maria Pesqueira, Council
Brittany Baumer, FPCC	Mark Templeton, Council
Carl Vogel, FPCC	Michelle Jordan, Office of Commissioner Suffredin
Cathy Geraghty, FPCC	Mike DeSantiago, Council
Chip O’Leary, FPCC	Mister.MCM
Chris Adas, FPCC	Nina Baki, FPCC
Chris Slattery, FPCC	Rex Tai, City Bureau
Damon Howell, FPCC	Shelley Spencer, Council
Delio Calzolari, FPCC	Terry Guen, Council
Eileen Figel, FPCC	Tom Rohner, FPCC
Greg Mueller, Chicago Botanic Garden	



## Land Acquisition and Disposition Position Paper

# Status of Implementation and Key Implementation Questions

## Land Acquisition and Disposition Position Paper

### Primary Recommendations Driving Implementation:

1. A recommendation on finding creative ways to acquire more land, with the goal of adding 21,000 acres of land to the system by 2040.
2. A recommendation to use land conservation models that do not necessarily include ownership, such as easements and other land management tools.
3. A recommendation to ensure that land use remains within our mission, including a moratorium on the formal conveyance or disposition of land while the current decision-making process is reviewed, and updated land disposition policies are proposed and approved.
4. A recommendation to continue to consider equity and access in decisions about the location of land to acquire.
5. A recommendation to build public support for the Forest Preserves (including the Board of Commissioners, strategic partners and the public at large).

## **Land Acquisition and Disposition Position Paper**

### **Key Questions Driving Implementation:**

#### **Sale of Surplus Forest Preserve Land**

For the future sale of surplus property, should there be a requirement that other land be identified for acquisition (in fee simple or by easement) of at least the acreage size of the land to be sold? If so, should the requirement mandate an actual acquisition or just identification of a parcel or parcels that may be acquired at a later date?

#### **Conveyance Review Factors**

Should the factors to be considered in reviewing a proposed transfer, sale, easement or use of land be supplemented to include (i) the impact on the overall acreage size of the main system of the Forest Preserves and (ii) the proposed use following the proposed transfer, sale or grant of easement or other form of conveyance?

#### **Conveyance Review Process**

3 Prior to the delivery of a conveyance recommendation by the Real Estate (or Land Use) Committee to the Superintendent for recommendation to the full Board, should the Real Estate Committee be allowed to confer with and secure the non-binding assessments or recommendations of other committees or councils of the District (including the Conservation and Policy Council)?

## **Land Acquisition and Disposition Position Paper**

### **Key Question for the Council:**

#### **Conveyance Review Process**

Prior to the delivery of a conveyance recommendation by the Real Estate (or Land Use) Committee to the Superintendent for recommendation to the full Board, should the Real Estate Committee be allowed to confer with and secure the non-binding assessments or recommendations of other committees or councils of the District (including the Conservation and Policy Council)?